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ABSTRACT

The fact that only 22 percent of adults in Illinois have children attending public schools challenges the idea of education as a "public good," yet despite many discouraging statistics concerning the public and the schools, there appears to be a growing awareness of the significance of education and an underlying foundation of faith in its value. In recent years public opinion of schools has changed; increasing numbers of Americans believe we are spending too little on the nation's education system. This booklet examines the implications for education of Illinois statistics on welfare and corrections and the link between property values and the perceived quality of a community's schools. It then presents the following policy options for reconnecting parents to their children's public schools: (1) school fact books; (2) school-run seminars to explain to parents what and how their children are being taught and how they may help to achieve the desired objectives; (3) parent-student-teacher contracts regarding responsibilites and expectations; (4) release time wherein businesses allow employees to attend to school matters; (5) parent hotline for information and help; and (6) personal pick-up by parents of their child's report cards. To reconnect the 78 percent without children in public schools, there are these options: (1) state and local district public relations campaigns; (2) local district outreach plans; (3) opening of school facilities to the community; (4) community service requirement for students; (5) community outreach as a teacher requirement; (6) educational banks; (6) community resource banks; (7) adopt-a-school programs for businesses; and (8) a local option modified voucher system tied to local school tax referenda. (LHW)

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Working Paper 5

ED276786

Education As A Public Good: Reconnecting People To Their Schools

A Joint Project of:
CHICAGO UNITED and
THE ROOSEVELT CENTER FOR AMERICAN POLICY STUDIES

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THE ILLINOIS PROJECT FOR SCHOOL REFORM

Preface

This paper is intended as a workbook for discussion. It deals with a major issue confronting public education in Illinois and in the nation. It is written with the belief that educators and non-educators can, when the issues are presented, engage in a democratic process of discussion which can lead to enlightened decisions.

We have attempted to do essentially three things in the discussion of this issue. First, we state the problem facing public education and we try to present some hard evidence that the problem does indeed merit our attention. Information from both state and national studies is used to substantiate the scope and depth of the problem at hand. Second, we try to explore the relationship between education and the well-being of society to illustrate the validity of the public good philosophy. And finally, we present some policy options we might consider in dealing with the issue.

Hopefully these choices will stimulate discussion and raise further questions. These policy options are not meant to be all-inclusive or complete. There may well be other and better approaches to take. The important thing is that this paper be the starting point for discussion of a complex issue.

Making public policy is no easy task. Dozens of moral, political, economic, historical and social variables interact to define what is or is not possible. Educational policy is even more complex because of the large numbers of people and interests involved. Yet as difficult as it is, our times call for serious discussion by serious people of the quality and future of America's schools.

Over a century ago, our nation made a historic and unique commitment to the concept of education for all of our people. Our goal must now be to keep open those doors of educational opportunity and to do our utmost to insure that once a child enters that door, the quality of the education received is nothing less than excellent.

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Introduction

Among the concepts central to the functioning of a free society, few are more important than that of the "public good." Simply defined, it means that certain societal activities are of such significance that the cost of those functions must be borne by us all, regardless of whether we actually use that public service. A basic idea of the public good concept is that the benefits of a particular service go beyond our individual needs and accrue to the society as a whole. Thus we pay taxes for roads and perhaps the Regional Transportation Authority regardless of whether we drive a car or use public transportation. Similarly, we have no choice as to whether we support the local police or fire departments even though, if we are fortunate, we may never personally call on them during our entire lives.

This same principle was firmly established during the nineteenth century in regard to our schools. Here too, in state after state, the decision was made to elevate the education of the young to the position of a public good. While private and parochial schools continued to function, all citizens were now taxed to support a public educational system. Whether citizens had children in those schools, or even had children at all was not relevant. It was decided that an educated citizenry was good for all society and the cost of that education would be shared by every adult.

While the idea resulting from that historic American transformation of education into the category of a public good remains intact, there are signs that a variety of forces have converged to challenge that concept as the twentieth century draws to a close.

Dollars and demography are challenging and the allegiance of the public. Runaway inflation and increased demands for government services have taken their toll on taxpayers. In addition, a general decline in public confidence in the schools has paralleled the schools' seemingly insatiable appetite for more and more public dollars. Meanwhile, school enrollments have plummeted dramatically over the past decade with an upturn in the numbers still a few years away.

In Illinois today 78% of the adult population have *no children* in the public schools. While they may be planning children or may have children in private or parochial schools, they have none in the *public schools*. Thus only 22% of our citizens have any immediate and direct connection to public education. Yet to maintain the concept of schools as a public good, the 78% — the overwhelming majority of Illinois' taxpayers — and those who currently have children in public schools must support those schools equally.

These forces raise the question as to whether we are experiencing the erosion of the idea of education as a public good? Do we still believe that principle is worth fighting for and if so, what can be done to revitalize the concept?

How To Use This Booklet

As you consider the possible options, you should address the following questions in evaluating policies to reconnect people to their schools:

1. Do the policy options insure a higher level of quality for students?
2. What are the political implications of choosing some options and not others?
3. What will the options cost, if adopted?
4. How will parents and the community react to the options considered?
5. Do any of these options undermine a strong *public* educational system or will the public schools be strengthened by these options?

As you discuss these and other questions it will be helpful to write out the points made by your group. By the time you have listed some points in each question, you will have a good overview of the educational, political and fiscal dimensions your recommendations are taking.

The Illinois Project for School Reform will be bringing together local citizens' councils such as yours to regional meetings. Hopefully, by that time, you will have discussed the potential options on reconnecting people to their schools and will be ready to submit your thoughts, in writing, to your fellow citizens throughout Illinois. These combined council suggestions will form the basis of our recommendations to reconnect people to the public schools. So in summary:

1. Read the paper.
2. Record your comments, ideas and suggestions.
3. Attempt to reach a consensus with your group as to what specific recommendations you will forward to the regional meetings.

I. Parents - The 22% Problem

In its 1983 report entitled *A Nation at Risk*, The National Commission on Excellence in Education addressed a message directly to parents of school children:

> As surely as you are your child's first and most influential teacher, your child's ideas about education and its significance begin with you. You must be a living example of what you expect your children to honor and to emulate. Moreover, you bear a responsibility to participate actively in your child's education.

The Commission's sweeping charge raises six first-order questions:

- What is the rationale for parental involvement in the schools, and is it valid?
- Does parental involvement in the education of their children and in the governance of their schools *actually* make a difference in the academic performances of their children or in the quality of the local schools?
- Has parental involvement declined in recent years, and if so, why?
- What conditions or barriers make parental involvement difficult — perhaps even impossible.?
- If parental involvement is a plus, what steps might be taken or strategies adopted to ensure involvement — and to ensure that their involvement is meaningful and constructive?
- To what extent should parents be held accountable for the academic performances of their children and for the quality of the schools they attend?

There appears to be little dispute that children do better in school when their parents are involved. We know, for example, that parents play an important role in their children's intellectual development in their pre-school years. It is no less true once they are in school. We know that the home and family environment is as critical to successful learning as school facilities, curriculum and staff. And we know too that student performances are influenced less by socio-economic background and family structure than by their families' expectations for excellence, their educational aspirations and their willingness to help. In sorting out the reasons why parents should be involved, this ranks first.

Educating children is not the exclusive duty of the schools; it is one which is supposed to be shared by the larger community — and most particularly by parents. Students, after all, spend more time outside school than in school and many other forces, both positive and negative, contribute to the educational experience.

Theoretically, at least, no influence is or should be more pronounced than that of the student's parents; they are or should be their children's principal educators.

A final rationale for parental involvement relates to the democratic nature of public schools. The public schools belong to the public and are supported by public revenues, including the taxes of parents. School districts are governed in almost all instances by popularly elected school boards. Teachers, principals and other school personnel are themselves *public officials* accountable to their school boards which in turn are accountable to the general public. This democratic character of the public schools is intended to encourage parental and citizen involvement in the decision making process of the schools.

There are two sides to the parental involvement question, and they need to be examined separately. The first relates to the support parents provide their own children. The second involves the ways and extent to which they are involved with the schools institutionally.

First, with respect to the education of their children, parents, on the whole, are not doing enough. The latest evidence of parental laxness was recently provided by the Gallup poll on public schools. On the whole, parents did not receive high grades — even from themselves. In fact, 36 percent gave parents a "C" grade for the way they are raising their children; another 22 percent gave them a grade of "D" or failing.

Even worse is the fact that everyone gets better grades than parents. The percentage of respondents giving their schools an "A" or "B" rose from 36 percent to 42 percent between 1981 and 1984. Teachers earning "A's" and "B's" went from 39 percent to 50 percent during the same period, school administrators from 36 percent to 47 percent. The percentage of parents receiving "A's" and "B's", on the other hand, climbed only 4 points between 1981 and 1984 — from 29 to 33 percent.

Second, there are far fewer examples of effective citizen participation in the schools than we might wish. There are numerous reasons for this problem and no one appears blameless, neither those who run and work in the schools nor the parents.

On the parental side, non-involvement results from apathy, fear or blind trust in the professionals, cynicism or outright abandonment — or some combination of these factors. In most school systems, parents and citizens believe they have little stature against the organized interests which make most decisions: principals, superintendents, teachers, school boards, state departments of education, legislatures, governors and the courts. It is not an environment in which parents are important players, and many of them know it.

In addition, parents and citizens lack basic information and, in some cases, access to the information necessary to play an informed role in school matters. Few organizations lobby for their causes. There are no political action committees comprised solely of parents and citizens interested in public education. The school bureau-

cracy even in small systems, can be intimidating. Many citizens believe it is impossible to learn how to penetrate the bureaucracy and make it responsive. And then there is fear — an anxiety shared by many citizens that if they rock the boat, raise too many questions and make too many demands their children will be harrassed or penalized. Such conditions — real or imagined — tend to discourage citizen involvement. While there are some parents who are plainly apathetic or honestly believe that schooling decisions should be left to the pros, there are many others who have tried to become involved and having failed either became cynical or give up altogether.

On the non-parental side, there are school people who neither seek nor desire citizen input, and do not respect it when it is given. Their resistance stems in part from a fear of creating a "pool of ignorance" which can inhibit rather than help the operations of schools.

Of course, there are also school people who actively encourage and welcome citizen involvement for the reasons cited earlier. Some are boldly experimental. They recognize that the success of students, individual schools and the district system depends heavily on citizen participation.

But even in these cases, there are demographic and social factors which the schools do not control and which militate against parental and citizen involvement. The influx of women into the workforce, for example, has led to less parental involvement. There are increasing and competing demands on the time of the middle-class — a greater interest in leisure, for instance. The divorce rate has soared. There are more single parents than ever before, and for many of them school involvement is less a concern than economic survival. And then there are a large number of citizens, representing every economic class, who believe education should be left to educators — that having paid their taxes they are relieved of any further responsibility for the schools.

II. Citizens Without Children In Public Schools - The 78% Problem

It would be incorrect, even unfair, to assume the 78% — those citizens without children in the public schools — are uninterested in education and unwilling to support the system. On the other hand, it is obvious that they are not as "connected" to the schools as we might wish. And yet in their hands are the experiences, wisdom, financial resources and political power which can make the difference between educational mediocrity or excellence.

National polls measuring public support for education reveal one important and interesting result — people with children in the public schools have decidedly higher and more positive opinions of the public schools than those individuals without children or whose children are not "users" of public education. The news media helps shape the opinions of individuals not directly tied to public education and studies have shown that the overwhelming percentage of education news is negative.

While both users and non-users of public education are called on for financial support, those most skeptical about school performance and those least knowledgeable about school operations appear to be in the majority. They are reluctant to raise taxes for education, and they certainly are a major factor in determining the outcome of local school referenda, two-thirds of which have failed in Illinois since 1977.

Politicians who must take the lead for increased funding are also influenced by this dwindling interest. From 1975-1984, the state share of funding for public education dropped from 48.3 percent to 38.3 percent making Illinois 39th in the nation in terms of the level of state support. This dramatic decline has not led to a public outcry or organized efforts to reverse the tide. In fact, the reverse is true. Should the political leadership propose dramatic tax increases for schools, it is probable the attempt would be met with strong vocal opposition and most likely be defeated.

Workspace:

For your notes, opinions, ideas and suggestions:

III. Education As A Public Good

It is clear that we have not adequately made the case that a good public educational system benefits everyone. While the American people have not turned their backs on public education, it is likely that the importance of public schooling has either been forgotten or taken for granted by large numbers of people, including the critical 78%, upon whose goodwill the schools' well-being heavily depends.

The case for a strong public school system as a benefit for the whole society is a strong one. It is a fact of economic life, for example, that people with more years of schooling have, on average, higher incomes than those with less schooling. Income increases with academic achievement for both men and women, a correlation unlikely to be reversed in the information age in which we live. But what about the community? Does it derive any benefit from the academic performance of its citizens? Most assuredly, yes. Individuals with higher incomes have more money to spend, which means the creation of additional jobs. Communities with higher incomes will also be able to offer a richer mix of athletic, cultural and community activities to its residents.

A. Welfare and Corrections

The picture is considerably bleaker at the other end of the educational attainment scale. Statewide, adult recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children were found to have the following profile:

Education Level	Number of Recipients	% of Total	Cumulative %
No Schooling	2,389	1.0%	1.0%
Some Elementary School	11,919	5.0%	6.0%
Elementary School Graduate	17,021	7.2%	13.2%
Some High School	124,663	52.5%	65.7%
High School Graduate	63,858	26.9%	92.6%
Some College	15,378	6.5%	99.1%
College Graduate	1,013	0.4%	99.5%
Not Reported	1,057	0.5%	99.9%
Total	237,298		

Source of Data: Illinois Department of Public Aid, June 1983.

The education level of General Assistance recipients, 16 years and older in the city of Chicago, follows a similar pattern.

Education Level	Number of Recipients	% of Total	Cumulative %
No Schooling	1,275	1.1%	1.1%
Some Elementary School	8,116	7.1%	8.2%
Elementary School Graduate	10,943	9.5%	17.7%
Some High School	56,163	48.9%	66.6%
High School Graduate	26,832	23.4%	90.0%
Some College	10,300	9.0%	99.0%
College Graduate	907	0.8%	99.8%
Not Reported	275	0.2%	100.0%
Total	114,811		

Source of Data: Illinois Department of Public Aid, May 1983

Nearly 2/3 of the AFDC and GA recipients dropped out of school before graduating from high school. Their subsequent difficulties at finding and maintaining employment have proved costly to themselves and to the state's taxpayers. In fiscal year 1983, the state of Illinois appropriated $852 million (half of which was received from the federal government) to AFDC and some $192 million in state and local funds to General Assistance.

The Corrections Department accounted for another significant portion of the state's budget. In fiscal 1983, it cost $13,252 to incarcerate an offender for the entire year in the adult corrections system. Offenders committed to the juvenile system were even more costly, namely, $22,876 for the year. These figures do not attempt to factor in the department's capital budget costs. On June 1, 1984, projects costing a total of some $130 million were under construction across the state.

Inmates in the nation's prisons, as well as those in Illinois' prisons, also reflect low levels of education attainment. Based on a survey of state prisons conducted in 1979, the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics made the following estimates of the educational attainment level of prisoners at time of commitment: 71.4 percent had not finished high school; 18.3 percent had graduated from high school; and 10.3 percent had had some college education.

The following table offers an additional view of education and the corrections population from a national perspective. It relates educational level to the likelihood of incarceration for street crime:

Educational Level	Incarceration Rate (per 1,000 males, age 20-29)
No school or kindergarten only	259
1-7 years	83
8th grade	70
9-11 years	46
12th grade	11
13-15 years	6
16 or more years	1

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, *Report to the Nation on Crime and Justice:* The Data, page 37.

In addition, the September, 1979 issue of *Corrections* magazine reported that "up to 50% of all adults in federal and state prisons cannot read or write." Frequently, this actual level of achievement is often three to four grades below the last grade of school completed.

Our schools and teachers cannot be blamed for every child's troubles. Yet, surely, some of our schools must have failed the tens of thousands of inmates and hundreds of thousands of AFDC and GA recipients in the state. Improved schools will not empty out the state's prisons nor reduce the number of individuals requiring welfare assistance to zero, but they can have an impact. Each additional success means not only an educational success, but a financial one as well. For each potential dropout who is encouraged to stay in school until graduation and then becomes self-supporting, thousands of taxpayers' dollars are saved. Clearly, we all have a very important stake in the future of our schools, regardless of whether or not our children attend publicly-supported schools.

B. The Property Value Link

Samplings of national opinion to determine who would be willing to raise school taxes consistently reveal the same picture: The older the voter the less likely that person is to favor raising taxes. The 1983 Gallup poll showed that little more than 1 in 4 persons over the age of 50 favor such increases while almost half of those aged 18-29 would favor raising taxes for schools. In addition to believing they derive no direct educational benefit for their own families, many of the senior members of this large voting group live on relatively fixed incomes. Thus, it is not surprising that they would be resistant to paying more taxes.

Yet, there is a fairly clear link between the value of residents' property and the perceived quality of a community's schools. Many families with children of school age are attracted to such communities because of its schools' quality; thus the presence of an excellent school system may increase the demand for housing in a particular town. Similarly, communities with school systems that have a poor reputation may experience a lower demand for housing and, thus, lower property values. This scenario is consistent with the findings of two researchers who drew the following conclusions from a study of 500 Michigan school districts:

> Families will spend more for each point that their school system's mean achievement test score increases . . . schooling is bundled with the capital expenditure on housing. Families planning to have children want to live in neighborhoods which will have the right kind of schools when they need them, and those whose children have completed school know that the market value of their house will reflect the value of the school system. (Brown & Saks, 1983, page 39)

The implication of such findings is that the generation over 50 years of age also has an important financial stake in the quality of its community's schools.

Campaign organizers of the "Yes to Schools" tax referendum in Rockford recognized this education/property value link. In addition to demonstrating the severe cutbacks in school programs that would have to occur without increased funding, they directly addressed the concerns of homeowners. "Without a quality school system," their campaign literature asserted, "We can't expect to create new jobs or to attract new businesses and families to our community." Newspaper editorials and members of the Chamber of Commerce stressed that the city's school system would have to maintain quality to attract new industries and protect local housing values. The campaign was successful. A referendum that was defeated 60 percent - 40 percent in November, 1983, was passed 60 percent - 40 percent in March, 1984.

Workspace:

For your notes, opinions, ideas and suggestions:

IV. Signs of Change

It is important to note that while many of the statistics concerning the public and the schools tend to be discouraging, there does seem to be a growing awareness of the significance of education to the general society and an underlying foundation of belief and faith in American public education.

The various studies of U.S. education published in 1983 were generated by a growing unease by many that our schools were falling in quality. The reports themselves have helped create an awareness that additional attention must be given to the schools if excellence is to be achieved. One measure of this change in attitude is the record compiled by the National Opinion Research Center during the past dozen years. The results from the past few surveys show a dramatic increase in public awareness that additional funding as well as added attention must be given our schools. In 1973 when the question was asked, "Are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on improving the nation's education system?" 49 percent responded too little, 38 percent about right and 9 percent said too much. By 1983 the figures had changed to 60 percent too little, 31 percent about right and 6 percent too much. The 1984 Gallup poll as well as the Illinois Project for School Reform education poll showed similar positive feelings of citizens for their schools. Americans clearly still believe that good schools are connected to economic stability and to the good of society.

Workspace:

For your notes, opinions, ideas and suggestions:

V. Some Policy Options To Consider

A. Reconnecting Parents To Their Children's Schools

Option 1: School Fact Books

It has been said that information is power. At the very least, information and knowing how and where to get more is a key to greater understanding. If so, parents and other citizens cannot be expected to involve themselves in the schools more fully and responsibly without information — without facts about the goals, governance and day-to-day operations of the schools. Therefore, the production of two handbooks — one prepared by the State Board of Education and the other by local school districts — should be seriously considered.

The first — *A Guide to Illinois Schools* — should outline the goals and desired outcomes of the statewide public school system. The constitutional and legal architecture of the educational system should be described, including the authority and responsibilities of the major institutional players in public education, most notably the State Board of Education, Educational Service Regions and local school districts.

This handbook, updated periodically, could contain descriptive and statistical information about school enrollment, teacher certification procedures, curriculum requirements, the state education budget, statewide testing programs and the school funding formula. In all cases the material would be presented in a form and idiom ordinary citizens could understand.

The Citizens' Guide To Local Schools — prepared and published by local school districts — would be designed to equip parents and other interested citizens to play a larger role in school matters. The guide could include the district's stated educational goals and outcomes. In addition, it could provide information regarding student enrollment, school attendance, student performance records (aggregated data), graduation and dropout rates, curriculum and graduation requirements, district budget and expenditure summaries by type and amount and college entry test information.

One section of the guide could be devoted to ways in which all citizens — not just parents of public school children — can help the schools and become more involved. In an era of tight budgets, one or more local corporations might be willing to underwrite the design and production of such a guide.

It is really impossible to play a game well if you don't know in advance what the rules are or who the players are. If we are serious about strengthening the linkages between parents and schools, then the insiders — those who already know the rules and how they are applied — have a duty to share such information with others.

Option 2: School/Home Link

There would probably be more parents willing to support their children's academic pursuits if they felt confident providing such support. With the emergence of new technology and new teaching methods many parents may feel unqualified to assist their children with school work. The public schools, of course, do not have sufficient resources to "reeducate" an entire generation of parents. However, they do have the capacity to conduct seminars for parents at the beginning of each semester where teachers (1) explain the purposes and goals of the courses being taught; (2) distribute the syllabus, outlining the expectations, project assignments, testing procedures, homework requirements and texts for each course; and (3) perhaps most important, suggest what parents can do to create a home environment conducive to achieving each course's objectives.

Parents could be given a modest reading list of their own to help them understand the field better. They might be given a short "lesson" in each course, again to increase their understanding of the course's subject content and how it is being taught. And in consultations with both teachers and counselors, parents could be advised about how to detect schooling problems and where to turn unashamedly for assistance.

Because students are central to the schooling process, students themselves should be required to accompany their parents to these introductory seminars. Their presence would reinforce the idea that their education is a joint enterprise which depends equally on the efforts of students, parents and teachers. Variants of this process are used in many schools. Formalizing it everywhere in Illinois would contribute significantly to strengthening the school/home linkage.

Option 3: Parent-Student-Teacher Contracts

The educational process should be viewed as a "bargain" between students, their parents and their teachers — an agreement among the three parties regarding responsibilities and expectations.

"The Learning Contract," developed by the National Committee for Citizens in Education, is a model of such an agreement. The contract is appealing for several reasons. First, it recognizes in writing that successful teaching and learning are dependent on the fulfillment by each party of certain responsibilities formally spelled out in the agreement. Students, for example, are expected to complete their homework in a timely fashion. Parents must pledge to attend as many school-related functions as possible. Teachers must agree, among other things, to reply promptly to parents' inquiries and to keep them informed of their child's progress.

Second, the contracts are individualized. In addition to delineating the sort of basic responsibilities referred to above, the three parties must agree to work with one another in treating specific

learning and behavioral problems. They, too, are detailed in the contract.

The third advantage of the contract is that once negotiated and signed it represents a partnership between home and school in support of a school child — a partnership which is arrived at based on dialogue and consultation between parents, teachers and students.

Fourth, the contract is important because it is tangible evidence to the student that his parents think education is important and that they are willing to become involved with him and his school.

Finally, based on a monitoring system agreed to between parent, teacher and student (for example, a simple weekly report card), parents and teachers can create a rewards and incentives system which is rational and related to the student fulfilling his contractual responsibilities satisfactorily.

Option 4: Release Time

Illinois business and employers should voluntarily provide their employees with several hours of paid release-time each month (perhaps the equivalent of a third or half day) to attend to school business. In addition, labor unions should introduce the concept into the collective bargaining process. Such release-time could be used for teacher conferences, or to permit parents to serve as teacher aides, tutors or lecturers or to assist with essential, but non-instructional, school activities.

This concept is based on the premise that good schools are good for the economy — and that parental involvement contributes to better schools. Businesses which agree to such a procedure should be publicly honored by their communities and the state.

To avoid abuses of the system, a simple affidavit system for those choosing to use the release-time could be developed.

Option 5: Parent Hotline

Frequently, ordinary citizens simply do not know where to turn for information or for help, particularly in crisis situations. And there are times when school authorities are either helpless to provide the assistance or for one reason or another are unresponsive. Because few people understand and can successfully navigate through complex and layered school systems, a way needs to be found to connect people with the sources of information or assistance they need. Consideration should be given to establishing a toll-free school hotline in the State Office of Education which would give citizens, as a last resort, a place to go in order to get help. The service would not exist to solve problems, but to point citizens in the right direction — where to go for the answers they are seeking.

Option 6: Report Cards

There are school districts in the country, including Chicago, that require parents to pickup personally their children's report cards. The procedure will strike some people as extreme; most districts either mail or permit students to deliver report cards home.

But a report, regardless how elaborate, tells a parent only so much — generally just the bottom line. The issuance of report cards, in fact, should be an occasion for individual parent-teacher conferences, perhaps parent-teacher-student conferences. It is an opportunity to evaluate a student's performance, to measure progress, to diagnose weaknesses, redefine personal goals and identify how parents, teachers and students can work together more effectively to remediate shortcomings and capitalize on strengths.

For those parents who, for whatever reason, are not involved formally with the schools and who seem to provide little or no support at home, this procedure could help open up these relations. It is one way of forcing parents to face up to the reality that the schools cannot educate their children alone — and that parental involvement, both at home and school, can produce enormous dividends.

B. Reconnecting The 78% To The Schools

Option 1: State and Local District Public Relations Campaigns

The Illinois State Board of Education should plan a statewide public relations campaign aimed at stressing the theme of "Everyone has a Stake in Public Education," with funds budgeted for radio and TV public service announcements, as well as newspaper ads. A local school district guide for "outreach" programs to the local community should be prepared. In addition, the Illinois Association of School Boards should take steps to encourage their members to view public relations outreach efforts in a new light. Public relations are no longer a luxury budget item. It is now a necessity.

Option 2: Local District Outreach Plans

Too many local school districts devote most of their attention to trying to reach out and communicate with the *parents* of the children in their schools only. Little thought and almost no effort are given to the community residents who have no children in those schools. The Illinois State Board of Education should require local districts to submit individual community outreach plans. These plans, which would be monitored and evaluated by the State Office of Education, should present comprehensive and specific steps and activities the local district will take to win the support of the non-public school taxpayers of the community.

Option 3: Open Schools to the Community

In an effort to increase the public's knowledge about how its tax dollars are spent, local districts should open the schools to the entire community. An active effort should be made to encourage citizens to use the school plant for meetings, as well as utilizing physical facilities such as track, gym equipment, pools, computers, etc. In some communities in the nation, adults are encouraged to attend classes in local high schools during the day along with the regular students. These programs also offer another positive opportunity, the chance for students of many ages, from teenagers to senior citizens, to learn about each other.

Option 4: School Districts Should Institute a Community Service Requirement for Students

Students need to understand that along with their right to an education comes a responsibility to the community which supports their schools and makes their education possible. Also, we need to provide those students with outlets for their enthusiasm, energy and idealism which has not been challenged or channeled since the most active days of the Peace Corps over two decades ago. Requiring one credit unit of community service for every high school student prior to graduation would be one step toward accomplishing these goals. The nature of their service could be determined by a community school coordinating council made up of students, teachers, administrators, school board members and community representatives. While numerous possibilities exist, the establishment of day-care centers and various projects to assist local senior citizens are examples of some programs. Such a service requirement would be beneficial to both students and the local community and could make a substantial contribution to addressing the 78% problem since many of the projects would benefit the entire community, even those without children in the schools. Surely the public's attitude toward the schools would be more positive and supportive.

Option 5: Community Outreach as a Teacher Assignment

School districts should consider relating a part of a teacher's assignment to some aspect of the districts' outreach programs. Rather than the traditional assignments to study hall, lunchroom duty and hall monitoring, teachers should be given the opportunity to develop plans and proposals which would allow them to participate in some aspect of the local district's total community-outreach plan. This might take the form of coodinating student community service programs, working with local social agencies or working in or with local community or business organizations.

Option 6: Educational Banks

Two-thirds of the local school referenda currently fail in Illinois. A large part of this failure is due to the public's perceived lack of personal gain or self-interest in giving a positive vote to raise taxes. Obviously single people, people with children in private schools and adults with grown children see little direct personal connection with increased support for public education. Such opinions might be reversed by the creation of an Educational Bank. The bare outline of such a plan would be as follows:

- Five percent of the local property tax paid by a property owner for the support of public elementary and secondary education would be put into an Individual Education Training Account (IETA) and used for *post*-secondary education or training in any *Illinois* accredited public institution. Vocational and private proprietary schools would be included in such approved institutions.
- The total amount in the account could be used by the taxpayer and/or his/her spouse and up to one-third of the accrued amount could be applied toward post-secondary schooling for the taxpayer's children.
- To qualify for the Educational Bank, the taxpayer must have lived in Illinois and paid property taxes for five years and must apply the money toward schooling in an Illinois institution.

Thus in a community where local property taxes are $2,000 per year the formula might look something like this:

- 5 year resident x $2,000 per year taxes = $10,000
- Approximately 80% of property taxes go toward education = $8,000 (80% of $10,000)
- 5% of $8,000 would be credited to taxpayer to draw on for IETA = $400.00
- If the taxpayer chose not to use the money and transfers it to his child, the amount available for that child's post-secondary education would be one-third of $400.00, approximately $133.00

Option 7: Community Resource Banks

Local districts should organize community resource banks which could assist schools and simultaneously reach out and involve the larger community. These would be modeled on the "Learning Exchange" concept which is already operational in Illinois. In such programs a central file is maintained on individuals who have special skills, experiences, talent or knowledge. These individuals are matched with others who are seeking such infor-

mation but may not know where to turn. Thus an individual desiring to learn to play the harpsicord would contact the resource bank to see if any harpsicord player is on file and could offer instruction. The two individuals are then matched-up.

Local school districts would profit from similar match-ups. Communities are filled with individuals who would welcome the opportunity to share their knowledge and talent with young people. The educational experience of students would be enriched and the added plus would be the direct involvement of many citizens in school activities.

Option 8: Expand The Adopt-A-School Concept

Adopt-A-School Programs have proliferated in recent years. Essentially these programs seek to connect the business community to the schools by having the business "adopt" a particular school and contribute time, personnel, equipment or money to assist in the school's activities. This concept should be expanded beyond the business community to include such organizations as the American Association of Retired Persons, the League of Women Voters, the local firehouse, the police department, the Kiwanis Club and even sports teams. Such an expansion will broaden the base of community support for the school.

Option 9: Allow for a Local Option Modified Voucher System

Legislation should be passed to allow citizens in a local school district to vote in referendum to institute a local modified voucher plan. The plan would be tied to local school tax referenda and would allow up to 1/2 of the new revenue raised by the tax referendum to be rebated in voucher form to parents of children *not* attending public schools. These could be redeemed at any accredited public or non-public school that would accept the child. Such a plan would give incentive to parents of *all* children to pass local referenda, bring needed revenue to *public* schools and allow local *choice* in the operation of a voucher plan.

Workspace:

For your notes, opinions, ideas and suggestions: